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9th November 1972

Professor J. Lederberg,
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Dear Josh,

I have now heard from all 3 of the people I wrote to regarding the 'private communications' you cited in your letter to me.

Neither Wilson nor Maxted had any objection to your seeing their letters, though they both make the same point as I did: namely that it is doubtful if you will get much more from their letters than what is included in my lecture.

Elliot is a good deal more 'sticky'. He has written a great deal more to me, in several letters, and his acquaintanceship with both Avery and Griffith was pretty intimate I gather. He makes the suggestion that you contact him directly and since he would like to have a look at anything you write before it goes to press, I am sure that it is best for you and he to thrash it out between you - if you think it worthwhile.

His address is:- Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.

With kind regards,

Marlin

M.R. POLLOCK

P.S. I'll send xerox copies of these shortly
MRP

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8 December 1969

KEPPEL STREET,
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Dear Pollock,

I must apologize for the delay in answering your letter of 21 November about Fred Griffith. I have been in Geneva for the last fortnight and have just returned.

I never knew Fred Griffith well - few people did - and I doubt whether I can tell you anything about him that Allison has not already told you.

Like W.M.Scott with whom he was associated for the last years of his life, he was a quiet unobtrusive man who was always happiest at the bench. Personal observation over many years gave both of them an intimate knowledge of the ways of bacteria. Unfortunately this was never committed to print and died with them; but anybody who went to them during life with a problem found them a mine of information, imparted in the most modest fashion and accompanied by helpful suggestions and wise criticism.

I doubt whether Fred Griffith ever realized the greatness of his transformation discovery, and a poor man - he died before Avery and his associates had published their work on the chemical basis of the change. I suspect he was rather surprised himself. Many years before, he had worked with his brother Stanley on the tubercle bacilli, and was convinced of the fixity of the mammalian types; and yet here he had produced a change in the types of pneumococci. The effect it had on others was naturally one of scepticism. And yet those who knew him best and were well aware of his scientific integrity dared not express their doubts in public. Griffith, they thought might have been misled by some technical error, but he would never have put his name to anything in whose truth he was profoundly convinced.

Fred Griffith and Leonard Colebrook were close friends

and used to go skiing together in the winter. They differed in character in many ways. Colebrook was jovial, loquacious, and at times exuberant: Griffith was quiet and reserved. But both were alike in their modesty and their absolute integrity.

Griffith, of course, never married; but, judging by his brother, I doubt whether marriage would have altered him very much. Stanley remained the quiet devoted bench worker to the end. Neither of them was interested in administration or committee work. And neither of them sought or expected applause. Fred seldom, according to my recollection, attended meetings. He was a classical example of the backroom boy. As the senior bacteriologist of the Ministry of Health, he might have been expected to take the lead in the organization of the EPHLS; but, though Topley always tried to force him into this, he much preferred to leave everything to him. He was without political ambition and was devoid of jealousy.

This is all rather rambling and will probably be of little or no use to you. If you want specific information on his personal habits and relations, you might write to Mrs Stanley Griffith at Cambridge. Fry would tell you the exact address.

Yes, I still ride my bicycle in London in spite of all the warnings I receive from my friends. And in the country it is much the best way of enjoying the various forms of beauty that God and man have created.

My best wishes to you.

Yours ever

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Graham S. Wilson

Dr. Griffith was a very quiet and reticent man, very difficult to get to know, and to me, and I am sure to most others, he was always something of an enigma.

In September 1939 he was sent to Cambridge to set up and take charge of the Emergency Public Health Laboratory. Most of the staff were strangers to each other, and Bruce-White, the other senior scientist.

Griffith was intensely shy and hated meeting people. Unfortunately there were a lot of people to be dealt with so he found the situation very trying especially as he also had no flair for organization.

Consequently with Colebrook's aid he manoeuvred himself back to London to set up a streptococcal unit at Colebrook's old laboratories at Queen Charlotte's Isolation Block at Hammersmith. Dora Colebrook was the other scientist. As this was also my old laboratory I knew the ropes and was able to run the day-to-day affairs of the laboratory without involving Griffith too much.

He lived in his own house in Eccleston Square with a housekeeper and her neice and travelled to Hammersmith daily by tube.

The laboratory was a real little backwater and suited him well and as this was the period of the "phoney war" things were quiet and proceeded as in peace time.

During all our time together I did not hear the transformation work mentioned and have always believed it lay absolutely dormant until Avery and McCarty showed an interest.

Griffith's streptococcal work was absolutely meticulous and his patience monumental, ^{he} he never talked over a project or sketched in a particular hypothesis upon which we might be working. My own concept of streptococcal serology which developed at that time was therefore rather scrappy. Griffith was extremely sceptical of new claims in streptococcal work and in 1940 he was only just beginning to accept the Lancefield group classification of streptococci which had been commonly accepted for several years.

When the blitz began we often spoke of the possibility of his moving out of the centre of London but he refused "to move for any German", and this was a matter of some pride. We suggested that it would be safer for his housekeeper and her neice. Griffith was willing that they should move but not himself. Consequently they stayed.

We were all late to work on occasions as we boarded up windows and helped neighbours with similar problems. Griffith was concerned with such things rather more often than we were and we often joked about the "old man's" troubles when he was late. However, there came a day when by lunch time he had not arrived and then a neighbour phoned to say ~~we~~ ^{asked} we knew his house was flattened. Two of us went to Eccleston Square and saw his home

literally flat and he, the housekeeper, and Dr. Scott were still under the rubble. The neice was unharmed.

Griffith was extremely patriotic and was the first with his aluminium pots and pans for Spitfires, and with War Bonds and in following other governmental exhortations.

The word "conservative" describes Griffith's politics, social and professional attitudes and every aspect of his life.

^{independently} There is no doubt that in recent years his work on streptococcal serology has formed the basis of much of the streptococcal epidemiology undertaken on an international scale. It is interesting to see how his slow and patient explorations on a rather narrow streptococcal front have complemented Lancefield's rapid and brilliant achievement in a more generalised streptococcal field.